

More than a year after the Gulf oil spill, the total cost of this man made storm on our region has yet to be fully calculated. The visible damage may have largely been removed but the scars will take time to heal. An important step forward in that recovery is ensuring that our coastal communities get the resources they need to regain lost ground.

Last September former Governor Bob Riley created the Coastal Recovery Commission to carefully study the catastrophic oil spill's impact on Alabama, and in particular, in Southwest Alabama. The commission's report, which was released in December, called for a strategic focus on strengthening our local economies and the environment. A regional partnership on the state, county and community level is needed to rebuild and to reduce our vulnerability to future disasters – whether natural or man made.

Each of the five Gulf Coast states experienced varying degrees of damage from the oil spill. Alabama, in particular, was dealt a serious blow to our Gulf tourist-related economy. The Coastal Recovery Commission recommended that federal Clean Water Act fines paid by BP and others associated with the spill be channeled to the states directly affected by the spill, and specifically to those communities at ground zero.

Under current law, in the event of an oil spill of national significance, any Clean Water Act fines paid will go to the federal government to replenish the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund to address future spills. The remainder of the fines collected would be directed to the federal general treasury. In the case of the 2010 Gulf oil spill, total fines collected are expected to exceed what is needed to replenish the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund. There is general agreement among the five Gulf Coast states that these excess funds should be put to use for Gulf Coast recovery efforts, rather than go to Washington.

On May 5, I introduced legislation – known as the Gulf Coast Restoration Act (HR 1762) – specifically directing 80 percent of the Clean Water Act fines levied in the 2010 Gulf oil spill be distributed among the five Gulf states of Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. The remaining 20 percent would be deposited in the Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund.

The Gulf Coast Restoration Act would mandate that each of the five Gulf states receives at least five percent and no more than 30 percent of these Clean Water Act fines for ecological and economic recovery. It would leave the decision of how much to spend on each up to the states

themselves. This is particularly important since some states, such as Louisiana bore a greater immediate environmental burden from the spill, while other states, like Alabama, experienced major economic losses. The long-term environmental impact of the spill is, of course, years away from a full assessment.

In keeping with the recommendation of the Coastal Recovery Commission, my legislation directs the majority of each state's share of CWA fine monies be spent in the communities which were directly affected by the spill.

The Gulf Coast Restoration Act has already received bipartisan support from 13 Gulf Coast lawmakers, including every member of the Alabama Congressional Delegation, as well as the endorsement of the Mobile Press-Register.

While my legislation is not the only bill introduced this session of Congress dealing with the distribution of Clean Water Act fines from the BP oil spill, I believe it is the most objective and would serve as a base from which a final agreement can be reached.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.